Freedom Watch

Citizens Project

This is a PAID INSERT

Evolution in our backyard

By Dr. Ron Walden

In our last issue of *Freedom Watch*, we covered some commonly asked questions about Intelligent Design and evolutionary science. These FAQs and more are available at the Citizens Project website: *www.citizensproject.org*

The Dover, Pennsylvania pending legal case involving the teaching of Intelligent Design raises concerns about challenges to the teaching of evolution in other parts of the country. Recently, the Kansas state school board challenged the teaching of evolution in that state's schools. So, for this issue of FW, we thought readers might like to have some information about current policy and practice in our local school districts surrounding the teaching of evolution. If you become aware of any challenge to the teaching of evolution in science classrooms in our community, we'd like to hear about it; also, please contact our office with any questions or concerns about the information presented here.

The following research was conducted by Dr. Ron Walden, adjunct professor of Research and Statistics in the UCCS School of Education. Ron is also a former superintendent of schools in District 12 and a former principal of Mitchell High School in District 11.

All biology textbooks used in metropolitan Colorado Springs public high schools cover Darwin's theory of evolution; none of them contain information about Intelligent Design or creationism. This conclusion is based on a recent telephone survey of all metropolitan Colorado Springs district science supervisors (or science department chairpersons in districts where there is no science supervisor).

Science supervisors or department chairpersons were asked five questions in the survey conducted the week of October 24, 2005. Does your biology textbook cover the theory of evolution? Do your teachers actually teach the theory?

Are you aware of any formal attempts to teach Intelligent Design or creationism in your school or district? Have individual parents questioned teaching the theory of evolution? How about individual students?

All the surveyed teachers teach the theory of evolution, with only one exception. A biology teacher in one high school refuses to teach the theory because he believes that it conflicts with his religious beliefs. He does, however, tell the students that they can read about the theory in the textbook. Understanding the theory of evolution is one of the state science standards and will be covered in the tenth grade science CSAP test. This test will be administered for the first time to all tenth grade public school students in the state this spring. Only one formal complaint by a group of residents in the last few years was reported in the entire survey. In 2001 a group met with the District 11 science

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Corporations paving way for equality

By Ryan Acker

Without the right to marry, same-sex couples in Colorado often spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in attorneys' fees piecing together the legalities of their relationships. From wills, estate planning, and other end-of-life decisions, to health insurance, child custody, and home ownership, gay and lesbian couples must pay attention to, and put into writing, every single detail of their partnership in order to protect their joint interests. A ten-dollar marriage license from the El Paso County Clerk and Recorders Office, plus about five minutes of the couple's time, provides immediate solutions to these and more than 1,000 other concerns regarding a joint partnership in the United States for opposite-sex couples.

Perhaps most detrimental to many gay and lesbian families is the lack of recognition for their familial status. Case reports from the local gay and lesbian organization, Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center (PPGLCC), identify several instances in which a person was unable to take leave from work — without the risk of termination — to care for a sick or dying same-sex partner, because the employer would not recognize the relationship. In most situations, were the couple married or recognized by Domestic Partner Benefits, the employee would have been protected under the *Family Medical Leave Act* (FMLA).

FMLA is a federal act that provides for time off, without the risk of losing one's job, in emergencies involving an employee's immediate family (though specific family ties and the definition of spouse may be left up to individual corporate policies). Those definitions are usually expanded as perks in an employee benefits package, which commonly include health coverage, dental care, and life insurance. Unlike FMLA, specific health coverage options, dental care, and life insurance are not necessarily mandatory or federally defined benefits, but government entities and corporations alike recognize that benefits packages are essential to recruiting and retaining a diverse and qualified workforce. Most benefits packages apply to both the employees and their spouses.

Realizing the inequity created by the state and federal government's failure to include same-sex couples in marriage laws, and recognizing that GLBT people make up a significant part of the American workforce, corporations and municipalities in Colorado and across the nation gave birth to the new classification of benefits for their GLBT employees, Domestic Partner Benefits. In addition, with the record number of GLBT people "coming out", corporations understood that their customer and/or service base would be seeking out

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Citizens Project wishes you and yours a happy holiday season!

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New Year's Resolution:

Join Citizens Project's Activist Network to receive timely updates on next year's legislative session.

Visit our website to sign up: www.citizensproject.org

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Evolution

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supervisor and also Superintendent Norm Ritter, requesting that Intelligent Design be included in the science curriculum. Their request was denied; as of now, they have not pursued their request further. The main reason their request was denied was that the District 11 superintendent and science supervisor both backed the position taken by the National Academy of Sciences, that Intelligent Design is not science.

Air Academy School District had a member of a district committee charged with rewriting science standards, who pushed for Intelligent Design in the science curriculum; his position did not prevail.

Manitou School District has a school board member who has supported the teaching of Intelligent Design in the science department; his position has not prevailed, either.

Complaints by individual parents about teaching the theory of evolution have not reached the level of department chairperson or supervisor.

Supervisors and chairpersons are aware of some students who have questioned the theory of evolution. This is nearly always handled at the teacher level. Generally, teachers point out that they are not trying to change student beliefs, but rather they are teaching them the view of the scientific community concerning natural selection and the theory of evolution. Students will be responsible for understanding the theory, which is a state science standard. Some teachers point out that if you desire to oppose something, the intelligent approach is to first understand it thoroughly.

For this story we also conducted a brief interview with Steven Mahone, spokesperson for Colorado Citizens for Science, a nonpartisan community group that promotes science education within the state of Colorado.

Manitou School District has a school board member who has supported the teaching of Intelligent Design in the science department; his position has not prevailed, either.

FW: What is your understanding about the current policy and practice of teaching evolution in our local schools?

SM: The standards defined by The Colorado Board of Education do not currently include a "disclaimer" concerning the teaching of biological evolution. However, there is talk that some lawmakers are considering a revision to those standards that would single out evolution as "unproven" and "a theory in crisis". If these lawmakers are successful, it would indicate a serious misunderstanding of what does and does not constitute a valid scientific endeavor. Science never claims to prove anything, since ALL scientific explanations are open to revision and/or correction (should a more thorough understanding of the data be presented and independently verified).

FW: What concerns do you have about possible local challenges to the teaching of evolution?

SM: The concern is the influence that organizations such as Focus on the Family, New Life Church, Summit Ministries, and others will exert on our local school districts to restrict the teaching of well-supported scientific principles such as the Big Bang, biological evolution, psychology, and a 13-billion-year-old universe. Without exception, the opposition to these established scientific areas of study originates from a religious world view that is uncompromising and absolute in its truth claims.

For more information about the Dover case or federal and state policy surrounding the teaching of evolution and Intelligent Design, please refer to the following resources:

Colorado Citizens for Science website: *www.coloradocfs.org*
National Center for Science Education website: *www.ncseweb.org*
Americans United for Separation of Church and State website: *www.au.org*

Corporations

(Continued from page 1)

the products and programs of corporate entities that recognize the GLBT community as part of its workforce.

Domestic Partner Benefits usually parallel a corporation's traditional benefits package, providing the same coverage for a same-sex domestic partner of an employee as for a married partner of an employee. Instead of a marriage license, the employee usually must present a signed affidavit that signifies the employee's relationship to a partner, and sometimes documents such as shared bills and/or checking accounts are required as additional proof of relationship status in order to prevent fraud.

As identified by the Human Rights Campaign, there are more than 80 corporations with headquarters in Colorado that provide Domestic Partner Benefits for same-sex partners of their employees, including Colorado College and the Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado, which have headquarters in Colorado Springs. Just as significant, thousands of employees in Colorado Springs are employed by national corporations that offer Domestic Partner Benefits, such as Wells Fargo, Starbucks, and Seven-Eleven.

Proponents of Domestic Partner Benefits argue that the benefits are necessary protections for gay and lesbian families until such time that civil marriage becomes an option to them. In response to allegations of "special rights", Avery Cross, a local member of the GLBT community, likened Domestic Partner Benefits for same-sex partners of employees to Affirmative Action for the hiring of African American employees, stating that the government and corporations have a responsibility to provide a means for alleviating the symptoms of discrimination until full equality can be achieved.

"Once equality and equal opportunity are fully realized, Band-Aids such as Domestic Partner Benefits and Affirmative Action will no longer be necessary," said Cross.

Indeed, many corporations attribute the success of their business and the talent of their workforce to taking proactive measures for recruiting, such as providing expansive employment nondiscrimination policies and implementing programs like Domestic Partner Benefits. Starbucks, which employs more than 80,000 people nationwide, identifies as one if its primary Guiding Principals, "Embrace diversity as an essential component in the way we do business," stating in its 2004 Annual Report that great things are accomplished when applying a collective mixture of differences and similarities in the pursuit of business goals.

"Embracing diversity is not only the right thing to do socially or ethically, it's good for business," says Orin Smith, Starbucks President.

Similarly, Wells Fargo CEO Richard Kovacevich says, "Diversity is not only good policy, it's good business."

Wells Fargo is a major employer in Colorado Springs, and boasts more than 146,000 employees throughout its national network. Identified as the 25th leading business in the world, Wells Fargo presents "The Business Case for Diversity" on its website, stating diversity is essential to Wells Fargo's vision, strategy, and continued success. The corporation provides expansive Domestic Partner Benefits, and proactively does outreach to the GLBT community and to communities of color.

"Embracing diversity is not only the right thing to do socially or ethically, it's good for business," says Orin Smith, Starbucks President.

Public debate continues over whether Domestic Partner Benefits are a positive step for corporations; however, positive business growth for companies that intentionally promote diversity (through programs such as Domestic Partner Benefits) seems to indicate that diversity is, in fact, good for business. And the number of businesses providing Domestic Partner Benefits continues to grow. The Human Rights Campaign reports a significant increase in corporations that provide Domestic Partner Benefits, over the past several years, with employers that provide those benefits now exceeding 8,000 nationwide.

Municipalities such as Boulder and Denver, as well as counties such as Colorado's Summit County, provide Domestic Partner Benefits to their employees and their partners. Though local, state, and federal governments may not be quick to buy into the notion of providing Domestic Partner Benefits for their gay and lesbian employees, corporate America seems to have moved ahead with the idea rather quickly — to their gain. Proponents for Domestic Partner Benefits see this as a positive opportunity for advancing equal rights for GLBT people, and are hoping that these corporations will be able to influence governments, such as the City of Colorado Springs, to move ahead in providing equitable solutions for gay and lesbian members of their workforce until full equality can be achieved.

Citizens Project

Understanding the precinct caucus system in Colorado

Now that the November election has passed, Citizens Project would like to provide *Freedom Watch* readers with information about another opportunity to get involved in the electoral process in our community. Colorado's caucus system can be daunting to infrequent or new party voters and deserves some explaining. Caucuses for the 2006 election will take place the third Tuesday in March but voters interested in participating must register with a political party at least two months beforehand.

The following information has been adapted from the Boulder County Democratic Party's website and the Colorado Statutes (referenced at the end). This information is nonpartisan and applies to any political party in the state.

What is a precinct caucus?

Precincts are the smallest political unit in the state. They generally hold a thousand or fewer people: basically a neighborhood. Your caucus reflects you and your neighbors. In an election year, each party has to nominate candidates, write a platform, and organize its effort to get out the vote on Election Day by precinct caucus meetings.

Some meet, do their business, and adjourn. Others discuss and debate for hours.

On the day of the caucus these precincts divide by party, and each party holds a precinct caucus at someone's home or in a public building. Anyone can come to a precinct caucus, but not everyone can vote. In order to vote, you have to be a registered elector in the precinct, and you have to have lived in the precinct for at least 25 days before the caucus and been affiliated with a party for at least two months. There are some exceptions: if you just turned 18 or just became a citizen, you are likely eligible.

At every caucus, the agenda is the same: Elect a chair to run the meeting; Elect someone to record the meeting; Elect two precinct committee people (often a man and a woman) to represent the precinct on its party's central committee for the county; Elect delegates to the county assembly; and introduce, debate, and approve or reject resolutions and platform issues.

Getting Started

First, the caucus elects a chairperson (or chairpeople) to run the meeting, as well as a secretary to write down what happens. Then it elects precinct committee people. In some caucuses, the same precinct committee people are re-elected and serve for decades. In others, the committee people switch off more frequently.

The precinct committee people will represent the caucus on the county party's central committee for the next two years. They're also expected to do precinct work, such as getting out the vote on Election Day and planning the next caucus.

Usually someone in the caucus speaks for each candidate seeking a nomination; in a presidential election year that can mean candidates for president, governor, senator, and representative, as well as candidates for state and county offices.

How are delegates selected?

When debate is over, it's time to elect delegates. These delegates will represent the caucus at the county assembly. Each precinct usually gets between two and six delegates; the actual number is generally decided by the executive committee of the county party based on a few factors:

The number of registered party members in the precinct; The precinct's performance (what percentage of people vote for that party in general elections); and How many delegates from the precinct actually showed up for the county assembly in prior years.

Precinct caucuses select delegates for candidates in only one race (which is chosen by the state party). So let's say in the November general election voters in El Paso County will be voting for a governor, a U.S. senator, a U.S. representative, state senators, state representatives, and a sheriff. A particular El Paso County caucus might elect delegates to the county assembly based only on those delegates' preference for governor, ignoring all other races.

In order to get any delegates from a caucus, a candidate must get at least 15% of the vote at that caucus. Incidentally, "undecided" is treated just like a candidate. So let's say a caucus gets two delegates and the vote breaks down this way: Candidate A gets 60%, Undecided gets 30%, and Candidate B gets 10%. That caucus will send one delegate for Candidate A, one delegate for undecided, and no delegates for Candidate B.

Important though the gubernatorial race is, what if you're really more interested in the race for sheriff? What do you do if you're in a caucus assigned only to vote for gubernatorial delegates? If you really care about the race for sheriff, you have to figure out which potential delegates favor your sheriff candidate, and then vote for them based on whom they want for governor.

If there are a lot of races, there are obviously a lot of possible combinations of favorite candidates. Since you can send only a limited number of delegates to the county assembly, you're going to have to wheel, deal, and compromise. Some precincts hold a series of nonbinding straw polls for all of the contested races. They give you an idea of who supports whom in which race and how much support each candidate has. That way you can see if your candidate for governor has enough support to get any delegates. If he, she, or it (in the case of undecided) doesn't, you can consider switching your vote to a candidate that does. It may sound odd, but not only does it ensure that your vote counts beyond the caucus, it also helps you select delegates who will support your candidate(s) for races other than governor (or whatever race your precinct was selected to send delegates for).

People at your caucus can also introduce items to be included in the party platform. You debate the items and then vote on them.

How do you actually elect your precinct's delegates?

Then you choose the actual delegates. These are the people who will go on to the county assembly where the whole process will be repeated on a larger scale. To elect delegates, your caucus will hold a real vote for governor. Then the chair will use a simple formula to apportion your caucus's total number of delegates among the candidates who qualify for delegates based on the vote. If your caucus gets two delegates and only two candidates qualify for delegates, it's pretty simple: each candidate gets one delegate. If your caucus gets three delegates and the vote is 80% for Candidate A and 20% for Undecided, A gets two delegates and Undecided gets one.

So who get to go as delegates to the county assembly? That takes a little more democracy. Your caucus will break up into mini-caucuses based on gubernatorial preference. In the case of our previous example, those in favor of Candidate A will form a group and those in favor of Undecided will form a group. By now you'll know how many delegates your candidate, and therefore your group, gets.

Then you'll ask who in your group wants to be a delegate to the county assembly. If more people want to go than you get delegates, you'll have to vote. One good way to get chosen as delegate is to convince people that you really, cross-your-heart-and-hope-to-die, will show up at the assembly. Those who don't get selected as delegates can be alternates. You'll select one alternate for each delegate. Alternates can go to the assembly, but they can vote only if the delegate doesn't.

What else can be discussed at precinct caucuses?

People at your caucus can also introduce items to be included in the party platform. You debate the items and then vote on them. If your precinct approves an item, it gets passed on to the county platform committee, which will discuss incorporating it into the county platform.

What usually happens after the precinct caucuses?

At the county assembly the process starts all over again, only this time you're nominating candidates for countywide office and electing delegates to a variety of assemblies:

The state assembly, which nominates candidates for statewide office, elects delegates to the party's national convention and considers planks in the state party platform.

The congressional district assembly nominates candidates for congress and the state board of education.

The senatorial and representative district assemblies nominate candidates for the Colorado General Assembly.

The judicial district assembly nominates candidates for district attorney.

That's a lot of assemblies, but most of them are held on the same day at the same location. Usually the congressional district assembly is held the night before the state assembly and all of the rest of them are held the next day at the location of the state assembly.

What determines the placement of candidates in a primary?

If more than one candidate gets 30% of the vote at an assembly it goes back to the voters and the eligible candidates run against each other in a primary election. Incidentally, candidates who don't get 30% of the vote at an assembly aren't necessarily out. They just have to collect enough signatures on petitions (the number is decided by the secretary of state based on number of votes cast in previous elections), to qualify. There is a catch, though: candidates who participate in an assembly and fail to get at least 10% of the vote cannot petition their way onto the primary ballot.

Most of the information for this story was gathered from the following section of Colorado Statutes: 1-3-102. Precinct caucuses.

Citizens Project

We want to hear from you!

We can all sense the changes in our midst. For many, this fall's elections brought welcome surprises to the landscape of diversity and public education in our community.

Citizens Project is considering changes too, as we head into 2006. Since early fall, our board of directors has been busy in a strategic planning process to consider the future direction of Citizens Project. For a long time, our successes have relied on specific projects helping us achieve our vision of diversity, equality, and religious freedom in the Pikes Peak region. The time has come for us to consider how we can be more effective. With these thoughts in mind, we are looking to you, the readers of Freedom Watch and our supporters, to help us chart that future.

How frequently do you read Freedom Watch?
(please check one)
- ❑ Every issue cover to cover
- ❑ Here and there when I stumble upon it
- ❑ Rarely if ever
- ❑ Other:_____

What do you enjoy reading in FW?
(check all that apply)
- ❑ Candidate Surveys for local elections
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Would you miss FW if we did not print it regularly, and we moved to an electronic-only format, on the Web and through email?
- ❑ YES
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Would you like to see Citizens Project's concerns printed more frequently in other media in our community? ❑ YES ❑ NO

If so, what media would you suggest we pursue? (including paid advertisements)

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Is there a topic that you feel Citizens Project should consider addressing in the near future?

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Anything else you would like to tell us?

_____

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To help us understand our readership better, please consider telling us more about yourself:

Age_____ Gender_____ Zip Code_____

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Please mail or email your comments to: Ellie Collinson, Executive Director; Citizens Project; P.O. Box 2085; Colorado Springs, CO 80901 or ellie@citizensproject.org. A copy of this questionnaire can also be found at our Web address: www.citizensproject.org

THANK YOU FOR RETURNING THIS SURVEY TO US. WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Be part of the solution.

"Citizens Project gives the public an opportunity to report injustice, to be listened to, and then to be part of the solution."

– Sharon Berthrong, CP supporter

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Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

❑ Yes, I'd like to support Citizens Project! Enclosed is my contribution of:

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MISSION:

Citizens Project spotlights issues in the Pikes Peak region and mobilizes people to strengthen the traditional values of our nation: equal rights, individual freedoms, separation of church and state, civic engagement, and respect for diversity.

Citizens Project

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